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Assistant Director for Operations

10 May 1950

Acting Chief, FDD

Operations of Foreign Documents Division

1. You have verbally requested my comments as to the CIA translation problem in its relation to the operations of FDD. I, therefore, respectfully submit the following as pertinent to the problem.

2. The problem is admittedly complex and yet has not been clearly and definitively or formally stated by any other office with the exception of the Office of Special Operations who commented on only one phase, namely Serbo-Croatian translations. [] of the Management Office is the only individual so far to register with me a complaint on translation. This was vaguely based on talks with several individuals in various offices. They amounted to three points.

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a. Point One. Several unidentified individuals in OSO told Mr. [] that they could not get translations done by FDD. This accusation is unsound if it applies to translations for which FDD has the linguists. The record shows that from the beginning of this operation to date more than 10,000 pages have been requested by OSO and of this amount only four requests, one each in Gujarati, Nepalese, Bengali and Bulgarian, were returned to OSO without translation. The return of these four was due solely to unavailability of linguists in those languages. In other words, of the thousands of pages requested by OSO, one or two requests a year have been returned. I have queried Dr. [] Chief, IOS/OSO, with whom I am authorized to liaise and who handles all such requests, and he has told me they have no complaints and are satisfied with the service being rendered.

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b. Point Two. According to Mr. [] a memorandum was written by D/EE- [] ORE to the AD/ORE and now apparently is being held by the Training Staff, ORE. In this memorandum D/EE states that FDD is doing a satisfactory job on the Russian press but that it is not exploiting the Russian periodicals sufficiently. This does not constitute a "translation" problem, but is one of exploitation.

c. Point Three. Some individuals in OSI complained about the distance between OSI and FDD and proposed that FDD should set up a small group of linguists in "M" or "Q" Buildings where they would be convenient to render assistance. This is a space problem which as you know at the present time is insoluble.

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3. Management has suggested that I compute the amount of work that FDD can produce and then extrapolate percentages of this for assignment to the various offices. Although such a procedure might be applicable to an industry or organization where the product represented a unity or at the most only a very slight disparity, we cannot apply it to the material with which we presently work. It is an appropriate solution from a purely managerial basis and as it would relieve me of many and continually harrassing priority decisions; the idea could not but please me personally if it were divorced from all other considerations. However, other considerations, such as the exigencies of intelligence requirements, the multiplicity of languages and sources and the irregularity of requests militate completely against such a solution.

4. Let us first clarify the problem a little. With a fixed T/O the input of exploitation requirements is twice the capacity of the T/O and the input of translation requests has averaged 1650 pages a month since 1 January 1949 whereas FDD production has averaged during the same period 1719 pages a month with an accompanying reduction of the backlog. Monthly irregularities were handled by corresponding adjustments in lower priority exploitation workload or by application of overtime procedure. If we are producing, therefore, translations requested, complaints on translation service could only lie in two spheres. One is the length of time involved in the production; the other would be that the offices had more translation which they would like to see done but which they have not requested. Complaints in the first category revert to the question of priority. The perplexing question of priority is soluble basically in only two ways, i.e. either one individual assigns the priority or a committee does it. The history of this question as it applies to FDD shows that a committee was once tried, chaired by OGD, and quickly dissolved due to the complexity of the problem. OGD then attempted assigning priorities to collection directives as they were issued but discontinued after a few weeks. For the past two years then I have been assigning the priorities on work requested. The question of a committee at this time is complicated by the increase of offices during the interval. OSO and OPC would undoubtedly object vociferously to a committee before which they would have to explain the urgency of their material. Frankly I think a committee would only engender considerable wrangling, much inconvenience and loss of time. Discounting a committee, the alternative would be an individual. The best qualified individual is, of course, the Director. However, he undoubtedly has not the time for such a matter. He must then designate the individual who will act for him in deciding priorities.

5. The second category of possible complaint would be if an office had translations which they would like to see done but which they have not requested. This nebulosity cannot be considered until the office denotes exactly what its translation requirements are.

6. Based on the above survey of the problem, I submit that no valid complaint has been made except in connection with the time

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involved in translation. Inasmuch as translation production is directly proportional to the number of linguists involved, if we assume the volume of translation to be constant, the time involved will be inversely proportional to the number of linguists allowed on the T/O. Thus, if the T/O remains constant, the time will remain directly proportional to the volume. A reduction in volume then is the only factor that will reduce the time. Your suggestions that we do not handle material dealing with Western Europe or Latin America would help at this point although percentage-wise the volume on these two areas is extremely small. Furthermore, spot rejection of requests from the Intelligence Advisory Committee Agencies other than those involving material in the rarer languages or highly classified material would also assist in reducing the volume. Going beyond this in arbitrary reduction of volume would place us in a very insecure position open to valid objections.

7. Reorganization of the division at this time is unjustified. I have carefully studied the allocation of linguistic strength in relation to the detailed volume of work and except for minor adjustments which we must make from time to time within branches I do not feel that any major changes such as a reorganization should be made.

8. From the above I have reached the following conclusions:

a. Management has no bona fide complaints on translation service.

b. Management's suggestion on percentage allocation of production is unrealistic.

c. Assignment of priorities is a real problem. Some one individual should be clearly designated to do it.

d. Reduction in volume of work should be made by spot rejection of material dealing with Western Europe and Latin America and requests from the Intelligence Advisory Committee Agencies involving material that is neither highly classified nor in the rarer languages.

e. No change in organization should be made.

J. J. BAGNALL

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